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Joint Panel Demands Speed In Atom Ship Development

By the Associated Press

The House-Senate Atomic Energy Committee — taking up a challenge from Vice Adm. Hyman G. Rickover—demands a Pentagon speed-up in development of nuclear-powered ships.

Immediate and major improvement in the nuclear submarine program is needed "to counter the rapidly increasing Soviet submarine threat," the committee said in a report released yesterday.

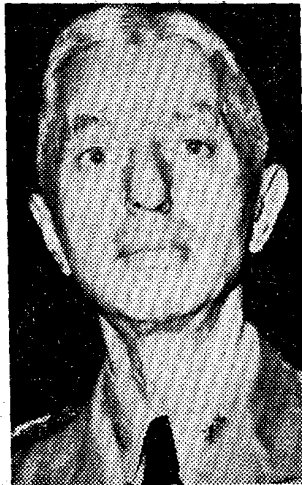
It accused the Defense Department of failing to press hard enough on development of nuclear-powered guided-missile escort vessels and destroyers.

The committee report accompanies testimony released after closed hearings at which Rickover, head of the Navy's Division of Naval Reactors, appealed for Congress to speed up nuclear ship development.

Cites Responsibility

"Does Congress any longer have anything to say about how the defense of this country is run?" Rickover asked. "Apparently the Department of Defense is operating on the basis that you have abdicated that responsibility, that it is now rightfully theirs."

The committee said it was



ADM. RICKOVER

"extremely concerned" over Defense Department treatment of the nuclear submarine program.

"In view of the rapidly expanding and improving Soviet nuclear submarine capability," it said, "the committee considers the Defense Department plan to limit future construction to only four more nuclear submarines, two for fiscal year 1969 and two for fiscal year 1970, and then to terminate the nu-

clear submarine building program, is most questionable."

The committee, long an advocate of nuclear propulsion for Navy ships, also criticized what it called a Pentagon plan to build only five nuclear-powered destroyers in the next five years and about 60 conventionally powered destroyers.

The Pentagon also should be required to move ahead on two of the three nuclear-powered missile frigates authorized by Congress, the committee said.

The report said the Pentagon had advised Congress it plans to build only one.

The committee also expressed concern "with the disclosure of U.S. naval nuclear propulsion technology to potentially hostile powers, through carelessness or apathy on the part of officials of the U.S. government."

Lack of Cognizance

A primary reason for such disclosure, the report said, is failure of technically unqualified officials in the Defense Department and other agencies to recognize the military value of information they propose to give other countries in line with political and economic objectives.

The committee said it also is

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concerned over Rickover's assertions the Navy needs a technically stronger design organization—and has had trouble securing some turbine generators.

Rickover was quoted as saying there are "deficiencies in submarine design capability" in the Navy.

He said the Navy is having trouble procuring main propulsion and ship-service turbine generators for a new type nuclear-powered submarine.

The committee said government power to force contractors to accept defense contracts should be used to solve the problem.

Our Navy and the Atom

The Joint Congressional Atomic Committee, in its lengthy new report, raises disturbing doubts about the adequacy of the number and the design of the nation's nuclear-powered submarines and surface warships.

The report is based on hitherto secret testimony, still heavily censored, from Admiral Rickover and other expert witnesses. It is sharply critical of the Defense Department's policy—worked out by civilian officials under Secretary McNamara—of limiting the development and production of such vessels.

In the committee's judgment, the situation cries for correction. "The Congress of the United States," says the report, "must take the initiative to insure that new warships we build for our first line naval striking force will have nuclear propulsion, and to insure that the program for improving and building nuclear submarines is aggressively pursued."

At present, our Navy has only four atom-powered surface craft, including the carrier Enterprise, and the committee urges that more be built as fast as possible, especially destroyers and guided-missile frigates. And, where submarines are concerned, the United States now has 74.

The committee feels that this under-sea fleet needs to be enlarged with improved units. It is "extremely concerned"

over the Pentagon's "most questionable" decision to limit future construction to only four more nuclear submarines. And it warns that "unless immediate and major improvements are made... the United States may find itself unable to counter the rapidly increasing Soviet submarine threat." Rickover's testimony, and reportedly the CIA's as well, strongly support this view.

Thus, the report quotes the admiral as saying that if nothing is done about the matter, our country will lose its numerical superiority "in a few years," and Soviet nuclear subs probably "will be superior to ours in some respects." Russia now is armed with 55 of these craft, and it is believed to be adding to the fleet at a rate of about 5 a year.

Of course, considering the factor of atomic overkill, and the dubious wisdom of trying to match the Soviets in everything, unit for unit, it may be that the joint committee has exaggerated the value of an all-nuclear Navy "freed from the umbilical cord for fuel." But the committee is one of the most knowledgeable in Congress, and it is not given to making extreme or alarmist statements.

The new report is the more impressive for that reason. It plainly suggests that a searching review of the situation may be in order, on a priority basis, after Clark Clifford takes charge as Secretary of Defense.